

VZCZCXR08131
PP RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ RUEHROV
DE RUEHB# #3539 3551647
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 211647Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6830
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 003539

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV BE

SUBJECT: BELGIUM'S KING ALBERT SWEARS IN VERHOFSTADT III GOVERNMENT

REF: BRUSSELS 3523

¶1. (U) King Albert II of Belgium swore in PM Guy Verhofstadt's third cabinet during the morning of December 21, 2007. Verhofstadt followed up this action with a speech outlining the ten-point plan that the interim government intended to carry out before leaving office on Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008. In addition to promising a new budget, pension reform, and measures to shore up declining purchasing power, Verhofstadt made a strong plea for moderation and dialogue across the language divide. We have emailed the full cabinet list to EUR/WE.

¶2. (U) The Prime Minister indicated that the Verhofstadt III government also would "further" the current military operations in the DRC, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Kosovo. He gave no additional details. He described the anti-terror arrests made earlier on December 21, and promised full engagement in New York at the UNSC. The remaining foreign policy elements of his address were unremarkable -- support for an EU with a liberal economy and a strong social, the Kyoto accords, and the recent agreement in Bali.

¶3. (SBU) In a discussion on December 20, the Prime Minister told the Ambassador that he was confident about being able to reach an agreement on constitutional reform issues before March 23. He intended to announce the outlines of a plan early in January. Among other steps, he will establish a "Committee of Twelve" that can oversee the reform process.

Bush

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